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SUBJECT: POSITIVE READ-OUT OF SLOVENIAN PM'S MEETING WITH
CROATIAN PM

REF: LJUBLJANA 40

Classified By: ADCM G. Shelton, Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) The Prime Minister's Foreign Policy Advisor, Marko Makovec, gave us a read-out of the February 24 meeting between PM Pahor and Croatian PM Sanader, which he characterized as more positive than portrayed by the media. Makovec explained that after the press conference, during which both sides staked out their old positions, the Prime Ministers sat down again and talked about the need for a way out. Makovec explained that they were "prisoners of Bled," which both sides interpreted differently. In discussing the need to find a way out, they agreed to focus on strengthening the economic ties to create an environment where they can move ahead on the political side. Whatever the solution will be, Croatia and Slovenia had to create a climate where the toxic media campaign ceased. The PMs agreed that the Foreign Ministers will meet on a weekly basis (as schedules allow). They also agreed to try to establish broader and better ways of communicating, including between civil servants and experts, as well as regular meetings of the Prime Ministers. Makovec stated that the goal was to reach some agreement on the way forward by mid-March to allow Croatia's EU accession to proceed. He acknowledged, however, that neither side knew how they would do it; but there were several ideas, some of which were acceptable, and some were not. He concluded that he was "modestly optimistic, much more so than the media."

12. (C) Makovec also shared the government's thinking on dealing with SSN's referendum initiative on Croatia's NATO accession (reftel). He said that the collection of signatures was not going as SSN had predicted (so far SSN has only gathered 260 signatures) and that it was "quite impossible" for them to reach 40,000. According to Makovec, the PM planned to wait for a few more days to see the trend in number of signatures, and then he would propose some face-saving solution for SSN to withdraw its initiative.

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